



ADVANCED  
RESEARCH  
RESOURCES  
ORGANIZATION

4330 East-West Highway, Washington, D. C. 20014 ■ 202 / 986-9000

June 27, 1978

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
President  
Rockefeller University  
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

On the same day that I received your request for a reprint of my peer assessment article, the Wall Street Journal published an article which made the reasons for your interest in this topic clear. I am intrigued by the possibility of applying peer assessment methodology to the peer review activity. I hope you won't think it presumptuous of me to take this opportunity to convey some of my thoughts on the application of peer assessment methods in the situation you confront.

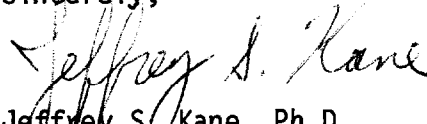
Appraising the performance of research scientists is of course inherently difficult due to the need to define and set standards for creativity. When these assessments are performed by peers these are added pitfalls to avoid (e.g., the application of excessively high performance standards, the distortion of one's perceptions of another's achievements in ego-threatening circumstances). When the peers doing the assessments are outsiders, the situation becomes complicated further by their need to justify their existence by finding faults, their access to only limited samples of performance (which may be selected by the ratee), their probable exposure to only the outcomes rather than also to the process of the ratee's work, and their lack of acquaintance with the conditions that may have constrained performance.

Other questions will arise that are common to all appraisal systems. Is the appraisal to be formative (meant to eliminate defects) or summative (pass-fail)? If it is formative, it must furnish objective, informative feedback to ratees on how they can do their work better. Are ratees to have the right to appeal? If so, what adjudicative body will hear such appeals and what rules and standards for evidence will prevail? Note that the choice of a peer assessment method sets fairly rigid limits on the types of process and content that can be employed in an appraisal system.

This is only a sampling of the issues that arise when the need for performance appraisal is confronted. I have spent the last five years intensively studying both the mechanics and dynamics of appraisal. One outcome of this work has been my proposal of new model for the measurement of performance which may be very applicable to your needs. The basics of this model are described in the other piece I have enclosed. Note that the proposed way of operationalizing the new model permits unlimited rater participation in all stages of the rating process, as well as the possibility of different people being involved in the choice of job aspects on which to rate performance, the setting of standards for performance, and the actual rating of performance.

I am basically a researcher but I do make myself available as a consultant in my specialty areas. Your peer review problem appears to be one on which I could make useful inputs. If the need for such input arises, please feel free to call upon me.

Sincerely,

  
Jeffrey S. Kane, Ph.D.  
Research Scientist

JSK/ygf